

UNIQUE

Life Group Leaders Guide

Directions

This packet contains the background information, series information, and weekly curriculum you will need to lead a life group during our *Unique* series. Everything on this page is to help you stay connected to the series as a whole. Behind this page is the individual curriculum to help you point people to Jesus. The *Purpose and Move* sections of the curriculum are for the leader to read or paraphrase to the group. The *Notes and Commentary* section is for the leader to get background information and go deeper into the passages before leading the life group. The curriculum was designed with your freedom in mind. Read through the curriculum and decide what will work best for your group. SOAP the passages with the group, use only certain questions, write your own questions, or use the curriculum verbatim. As the leader, you know what will point your people to Jesus.

Series Overview

Google estimates that there are roughly 4,200 religions currently being practiced around the world. That means a person could practice a new religion everyday for almost 12 years without repeating one. With all these religions, what differentiates our religion from the others? What sets us apart? With so many other religions, why should an individual choose to follow Jesus? That is what we will be talking about during *Unique*. We will be taking three weeks to walk through what makes Christianity and its followers unique to the religions of this world. By looking at grace, love, and diversity; which are all distinct to Christianity, we hope this will be a time of affirmation and discovery for you and your family.

Life Group Overview

During the *Unique* series our life group curriculum will cover the same topic that was covered from stage but using a different passage or set of passages. Each curriculum will begin with an unpacking of the previous Sunday's service to help the leader open up the topic for the study and also see how people responded to the Sunday teaching.

Unique Series Schedule

Week	Sermon Date	Topic of sermon	Topic of life group
Week 1	8/13	Grace	Romans 3:20-24 & Romans 6:1-4
Week 2	8/20	Loving Others	John 15:9-17 & John 13:34-35
Week 3	8/27	Diversity	Revelation 7:9 & Acts 10:9-48

The Point Church Life Group Curriculum

Unique - Week 3 - Loving Others - Revelation 7:9 & Acts 10:9-48

Purpose of Study

Many people, even Christians, proclaim that they are “color blind” in regards to different races. While this is a noble approach to different races and combating racism, this is not the way God looks at our world. God made color, loves color, and wants His kingdom to be a diverse group of individuals that can use their culture, background, and experiences to show different facets of His love. In this study, we will see God’s final plan for His kingdom (which includes all different types of people) and then go backwards in the bible to see when one of the apostles learned the lesson from God personally. The hope is that this study would help us see God’s love for diversity and then move us to be a people that value diversity.

Note to the leader: Move #3 is a story from Acts with a large number of verses. If you feel pressed for time, we suggest you cut out Move #1 (please do not cut out Move #2), move quickly through Move #1 and #2, and/or paraphrase a lot of the story in Acts to save time.

Flow of Study

Optional Icebreaker: When is the last time you were in a place where you were the obvious minority (does not have to mean a racial minority)? What was that like?

Move #1: Since the sermon series and life groups are covering the same topics, it might be a good idea (both for content and time) to begin the discussion with some unpacking questions from this Sunday’s sermon.

1. Did anything stand out to you from the sermon this weekend?
2. What is one thing from the sermon that you want to apply this week?
3. Why is a understanding of diversity necessary for the believer? Does this set us apart from other faiths?

Move #2: Now that we have unpacked the Sunday sermon and reintroduced the topic of diversity, let’s go to the end of the bible to see what God has in store for His kingdom. In the passage we are reading John is seeing a vision of what it will look like when Jesus comes back for His followers. What we are looking at is only a snippet of the entire vision but it does a good job of illustrating how God’s kingdom will look.

Read Revelation 7:9 (NIV)

⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

1. What stands out to you from this passage?

2. “No one could count” alludes to a VERY large number of people. What does that tell us about God’s vision for Christianity and its growth?
3. Jesus is clear in the Lord’s Prayer that God’s will is to be done “on Earth as it is in heaven.” If this is what heaven looks like, what should the Christian’s response to diversity be as we wait for Christ’s return?
4. Personally, do you feel like you desire (not just accept but desire) diversity in your congregation, leadership, life group, and core group? If not, why do you think that is the case?
5. Do you think our church does a good job of desiring diversity? What do you think our church (or even our life group) could do to further embrace God’s view of diversity?
6. Unfortunately, desire is not enough. Thank God that Jesus did not just desire us, he came for us. What does it look like to shift from desire to actually pursuing diversity? What would that take for us and our church?
7. William Seymour, the African-American leader of the Azusa Street revival from 1906-1915, concluded that the greatest sign of the Spirit’s work was love, especially and necessarily as expressed across racial and ethnic lines. Do you agree? Why do you think that is the case? Do you think his assumption from the early 1900’s is fitting for today?

Move #3: It is obvious that our God loves diversity. Our religion is one that embraces color, language, and culture instead of trying to alter it. That truth is easy to read on paper but harder to work out in practice. We will spend the rest of our time looking at one of the apostles and his revelation from God regarding a very similar situation. Before we dive into the passage, we need to uncover a little bit of context/background.

Background: In the passage we are about to read, Jesus has ascended into heaven and given his followers the great commission to reach ALL people. Directly before the story we are reading tonight, a man from Caesarea (considered the “showpiece of Roman culture”) named Cornelius has a vision from God to reach out to Peter. Cornelius is a gentile or non-Jew and Peter is a Jew. During this time period, Jews and Gentiles did not commonly mix despite Jesus’ command to go to ALL people. Cornelius is labeled in the text as a “god-fearing” gentile which would help his case in a Jew’s eyes but it would still be uncommon for them to share their life, food, and homes with one another. Gentiles were typically looked at and approached as unclean and not knowing the real God. One of the things that set the Jews apart is that they believed in upholding a certain diet as a means to remain “clean” in front of God. Certain foods were considered “unclean” and therefore a Jew would not touch them. In the story tonight, God is going to use this clean/unclean food predicament to speak into the Jew/Gentile tension in a way to teach Peter about the all inclusive gospel. We will read the story in a giant chunk and then unpack it afterwards.

Read Acts 10:9-35 (NIV)

⁹ About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. ¹³ Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” ¹⁴ “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” ¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” ¹⁶

This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven. ¹⁷ While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. ¹⁸ They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there. ¹⁹ While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." ²¹ Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?" ²² The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." ²³ Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. ²⁴ The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. ²⁶ But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself." ²⁷ While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸ He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

³⁰ Cornelius answered: "Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me ³¹ and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. ³² Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' ³³ So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us." ³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.

1. What stands out to you from this passage?
2. Reread Peter's response to the vision in verses 13-14. What is unique about this response? How is this also the response of many Christians to diversity and the all-inclusive gospel?
 - a. **Hint:** What Peter says here is an oxymoron. You can't say "surely not" to something God asks you to do and refer to him as "Lord" in the same sentence. Many Christians seem very open to the idea of diversity and God's view of diversity but do little in obedience to it.
3. The Jew/Gentile and clean/unclean situations are not common in America today, however, where do you see the same sort of prejudices in the American church?
 - a. **Possible answers:** interracial marriage, immigration, comfort with language barriers, cross cultural adoption, attire in service, worship style and music, etc.
4. What do these prejudices show about our understanding (or lack of understanding) of the gospel? What do they reveal about our relationship with God?
 - a. **Hint:** When people realize that they are accepted as significant and useful to the kingdom not because of any merit of their own but only because of the mercy of God, they also realize that they cannot look down on anyone. In what is most important to them, they are undeserving recipients of glorious gifts. Prejudice, then, is an expression of insecurity and feelings of inferiority. If we do not feel secure and accepted in Christ, we need earthly things to make us feel important. One of those earthly things is the idea that we are superior to others. To one who has truly understood grace, such a position is an impossibility.

5. Peter definitely had prejudices he needed to deal with and appropriately did so. Outside of his huge moments of revelation (vs. 28 and 34-35) he was also doing little things that prepared his heart for a change in perspective. Can you identify these places in the story?
 - a. **Possible answers:** Peter was staying with a tanner which would be pushing the boundaries of their culture (see commentary section for more insight into this), Peter was spending personal time with the Lord (v. 9), he was open to ways the Lord might be moving (v. 17), he was obedient in small things (v. 21 and v. 23), he explored ways that he thought the Lord might be leading him, and was willing to allow his faithfulness to Jesus to trump his cultural identity and misconceptions.
6. What are things we could do to combat our prejudices in our own life?
 - a. **Possible answers:** pray God's truth in Revelation 7:9 back to Him and ask for the same passion for diversity, intentionally pursue people in your life that are not like you, go to the Care Center food pantry on a Saturday and intentionally converse with someone of a different culture.

Move #4: In our last move, let's try to apply what we uncovered in this study to our lives.

1. What stood out to you from our discussion that you are going to take with you?
2. What is something going on in your life right now that these passages spoke directly to?

Prayer: End your study with a time of prayer where people can share prayer requests and be prayed for before they leave. If possible, please steer some prayer towards what your group talked about during this study.

1. It could be wise to include in your prayer time the key verses from tonight and ask God to reveal and change our exclusive hearts (verses such as v. 28 and vs. 34-35).

Notes and Commentary

The following are pieces of commentary, facts, and links based on the passages of this study in order. Use them to help supplement your group time or for your personal preparation.

Revelation 7:9

- That the multitude is countless probably echoes the promise to the patriarchs ([Gen. 13:16](#); [15:5](#); [32:12](#)). But here the promised multitude is gathered from all nations; the hope of the gospel has touched all peoples.⁴ It is striking that Christians appear here as a group "no one could count" (numbering at minimum in the millions; cf. [5:11](#)), "since the number of Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, living toward the end of the first century a.d. cannot have been very large."⁵ This vision would encourage John of the success of Christian witness. (Keener)
- The international focus of Revelation goes far beyond its contemporaries' expectations and proves central to New Testament teaching because it is so radical: Gentile Christians can be grafted into God's people. In contrast to the early church, no one today is surprised to discover that many Gentiles are Christians, but we can still learn from the principle that God embraces those whom we do not expect. Sometimes we harbor our suspicions about various groups' receptivity to the gospel (e.g., Hindus or Muslims). Some peoples may be more open to the gospel because they have experienced more positive exposure to it; ironically, Jewish people, from whom the gospel spread to the Gentiles, have

often been turned off to the gospel by centuries of “Christian” hostility, including being tortured during the Inquisition, burned on crosses, and forcibly drowned in the name of baptism. Yet the gospel challenges our prejudices. I and my multicultural teammates had the opportunity to lead many African-Americans, many Puerto Ricans, and a few Anglos to Christ doing personal evangelism in New York City; during the same time I was unsuccessful in leading to Christ any of the Russian Jews among whom I also ministered. But many did begin to listen to us, and a harvest came later. We have no right to decide who will receive God’s good news, and we may be grateful that those who witnessed to us or to our spiritual predecessors did not prejudge its proper recipients. But if we claim any loyalty to Christ’s gospel, this requires us to transcend our cultural prejudices both to witness to and to lovingly embrace believers from all cultures (cf. [Rom. 1:14–16](#); [1 Cor. 12:13](#); [Gal. 3:28](#)). (Keener)

- How should we envision Revelation’s multicultural throng? Both archaeology and writings from John’s day show us that his audience knew of not only the Mediterranean world, but also of kingdoms and traders from west and east Africa, India, China, and the British Isles, all peoples so remote from the first Christians that the image of “every tribe” may have demanded considerable faith. Our geographical knowledge today is richer, and the gospel entrenched in far more cultures.²⁷ Imagine the multicultural chorus of saints from all ages—ancient Israel’s Levite psalmists, clapping African saints with joyful praises, European Reformers with their majestic hymns, monks with their Gregorian and Ethiopian Coptic chants, Latin American Pentecostals with shouts of triumph, messianic Jews dancing the horah, and a generation of North American street evangelists doing gospel rap! (Keener)
- Many Christians today think that the gospel obliterates cultural distinctions (and sometimes expect Christians from other cultures to simply join their churches and assimilate into their “normal” cultural style of worship). But this text suggests that, far from obliterating culture, God takes what is useful in each culture and transforms it into an instrument of praise for his glory.²⁸ One of my professors in my missions concentration during my seminary career was Morris Williams, for the previous decade the U.S. missions director for a Pentecostal denomination in Africa.²⁹ It was he who first opened my eyes to the fact that this text suggests not the obliteration of cultures in the world to come, but the celebration of the gifts God has given each people and culture (and mixture of cultures) offered for his glory. (Keener)
- As Charles Wesley cried, “O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise!” Worship in the Spirit (see comment on [1:10](#)) transcends cultural prejudices, but often brings forth God-given elements in various cultures, because God is too big to be limited to a single culture’s worship style, even if it is a dominant culture that thinks it has the only normative way of offering praise! This is not to suggest that we can or should try to blend or represent all these expressions in one local congregation, which must prove relevant first to its own community. But it offers a hope for the future as well as an ideal for the present. God has sown into thousands of cultures through history aspects of his image in humanity; just as human immune systems are stronger the more genetically distinct their parents, so the body of Christ is strongest when it incorporates the perspectives of all its members.³⁰ (Keener)

Acts 10:9-35

- **(on Peter staying with a tanner)** It is significant that Peter would accept hospitality from Simon since the occupation of leather-worker (a tanner, βυρσεύς) was considered to be unclean by the Pharisees. A tanner was one of the most unclean trades in any ancient society, the nature of their work kept them in a state of ritual uncleanness (Lev 11:35), and the process of tanning leather resulted in a state of physical uncleanness. The rabbis mention tanners or tanneries in the context of other “unclean things.” For rabbis, a tannery is in the same category as a bathhouse and public urinal and a tanner is lumped

together with “he who is afflicted with boils, or who has a polypus, or who collects dog excrement.” Because of the stench of the tanner’s shop, most towns required that the tanner had to live on the outskirts of town, downwind! It is possible that Simon owns a tanning business and does not work the trade himself. But business appears to be good for Simon since he is able to open his home to Peter. The home is large enough to have a gate and courtyard far enough away from the house that Peter did not hear Cornelius’ men arrive (10:17-18). That Peter shares hospitality with Simon is significant. Just like Jesus, he is eating and drinking with the outcast, people who are Jewish but on the fringe of society from the perspective of Temple purity and Pharisaical tradition. While tanners are never included in the list of outsiders with whom Jesus eats, they might very well be in the same category as tax collectors and prostitutes. It is therefore quite curious that Peter hesitates when he is told to God to Cornelius in chapter 10. This is a testimony to how far Jews and Gentiles were separated culturally. Peter has no problem staying in the home of a tanner who was unclean, yet will not enter the home of a Gentile God-fearer, someone who was likely more “clean” than the tanner, with respect to the Law. The difference, of course, is that even if Cornelius was a God-Fearer, he was still an uncircumcised Gentile. (<https://readingacts.com/2013/02/16/acts-943-peter-and-simon-the-tanner/>)

- **(on verses 14-16)** Jewish people had preferred death to eating unclean food in the time of the Maccabees, thus Jewish readers would be appalled that God would require anything so disgusting and impious. (Keener)
- **(on verse 14)** Peter needed a drastic message from God to get rid of his prejudices about distinctions among people suggests that even mature Christian leaders may occasionally need a major paradigm shift in order to come into line with God’s thinking. Peter’s initial response to the command in the vision ([10:14](#)) is typical: “Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” As J. A. Alexander points out: “Even [divine] authority was not sufficient to break the force of prejudice and habit.” (Fernando)
- **(on verses 17-23a)** Cornelius’s messengers stop at Simon’s gate (v. [17](#)), and the Holy Spirit instructs Peter to go with the men (vv. [19-20](#)). While we are told that the Spirit spoke to Peter, we must note that Peter was in a fit state to receive a communication from God. Luke says he was “wondering about the meaning of the vision” (v. [17](#)) and “thinking about the vision” (v. [19](#)). The word translated “thinking” (dienthymeomai), which appears only here in the Bible, means “to think about something thoroughly and/or seriously.” Louw and Nida say it is used to indicate intensity of thought.²¹ While God led Peter clearly, he was earnestly seeking to find God’s will. Peter’s bold step of inviting “the men into the house to be his guests” (v. [23a](#)) introduces an important emphasis in this passage, that of hospitality.²² “It was easier for a Jew to have Gentiles stay with him than for a Jew to stay with Gentiles. Nevertheless, this kindly act was a great step forward for Peter.” (Fernando)
- **(on verse 23a)** Pharisee’s and other pietists were concerned about impure table fellowship; lodging Gentiles overnight, no matter how exhausted the guests may have been, contradicted strict Jewish piety. Eating with them was forbidden on the principle that they were evil company. (Keener)
- **(on verse 23b-33)** Peter’s discovery, as he explains to his audience, is the pivotal message of this whole passage: “God has shown me that I should not call any man impure [koinos] or unclean” (v. [28](#)). Earlier we noted that koinos means “common.” Here it has the idea of “being ritually unacceptable either as a result of defilement or because of the very nature of the object itself.”²⁵ A big shift has taken place in Peter’s thinking, for he now realizes that no longer are the typical Jewish distinctions among people significant. They have been rendered void once and for all. In this episode Jew and Gentile

have come together (cf. v. [28](#), as well as the repeated use of the prefix *syn* ["together with"] in compound words in this scene). (Fernando)